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ABSTRACT

A survey of 225 parents of high school sophomores in a Minnesota community was undertaken in the fall of 1974 to determine parental attitudes about potentially controversial issues in high school English materials. In one sense, the intent of the survey was to determine "community standards." With the exception of objectionable language, parents were generally tolerant and not prone to censorship. Other topics included in the survey were questions about using literature or films that contain violence, black characters, drug use, antireligious viewpoints, and sexual relationships and questions about general attitudes concerning the function of literature in high schools. No significant differences were found to exist in the attitudes of subjects in different age, sex, or education groups. Parents were more tolerant of films than of books. (Author)

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

CENSORSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY:
A SURVEY OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARD CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH PROGRAMS

by

Susan Nagengast

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ABSTRACT

A survey of 225 parents of high school sophomores in a Minnesota community was undertaken in the fall of 1974 to determine parental attitudes about potentially controversial issues in high school English materials. In one sense, the intent of the survey was to determine "community standards." With the exception of objectionable language, parents were generally tolerant and non-censorprone. Other topics included in the survey were questions about using literature or films that contain violence, Black characters, drug use, anti-religious viewpoints, and sexual relationships and questions about general attitudes about the function of literature in high schools. No significant differences were found to exist in the attitudes of subjects in different age, sex, or education groups. Parents were more tolerant of films than books.

In all the fuss about crowded schools and the teacher shortage, Americans are overlooking a much graver threat to public education--the plague of censorship seeping the nation's schools. More and more frequently across the country, vigilante committees are arising to denounce books that for one reason or another displease them. The result is growing panic among teachers and school officials, and in many places alarming decline in the quality of instruction.

Edward J. Gordon

CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE 3

History of Censorship. 3
Research Findings. 5
Incidence of Censorship. 7
Reason for Objections. 10
Effects of Censorship. 10
Curricular Causes. 11
Summary of Review. 14
Conclusion 14

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY. 16

Assumptions. 16
Community Description. 17
Population and Sample. 18
The Questionnaire. 18
Scoring The Responses. 19
Hypotheses 21
The Variables. 21
Definitions. 21
Censorship 21
Objection. 21
Tolerant 22
Limitations of the Study 22
Pilot-Testing the Questionnaire. 22
Mailing and Return of Surveys. 22

III. FINDINGS 24

General Tolerance Levels 24
Table I-Distribution of Survey Scores. 25
Graph I-Distribution of Survey Scores. 26
Table II-Distribution of Survey Scores by Five Levels. 29
Film versus Print 30
Table III-Mean Survey. 31
Individual Questions 32
Table IV-Censor-prone Responses. 33
Comments 42

CONCLUSIONS. 45

Page

APPENDIXES

A. Cover Letter. 47
B. Pilot Test Evaluation 48
C. Survey and Results. 49

BIBLIOGRAPHY 51

INTRODUCTION

In the fifth century B. C., Plato wrote that"the power which poetry has of harming even the good (and there are very few who are not harmed), is surely an awful thing."[1] Twenty-five hundred years has not seen the demise of that sentiment; rather, censors are becoming more vocal and adament, as exemplified by a minister who, in 1969, argued that "immoral" literature permeated American classrooms and that "to keep student subjected to class hours of seeking and searching for the meaning of life is to leave them in a state of frustration when no definite answers are given. It is cheating them out of a bona fide English course."[2] More than ever, English teachers are likely to become entangled in struggles over language arts materials. It may seem paradoxical in an allegedly increasingly permissive society, but English teachers have to face the fact that almost any piece of literature they use in the classroom may cause ire in the community.

By now the awareness of the incidence of censorship cannot escape English teachers. All have read of the sensational incidents of book burning in North Dakota and violent protests in West Virginia.[3] And, as will be documented, unpublicized incidents are known by most

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[1]Plato, The Republic, Book X in Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. W. J. Bates (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), p. 47

[2]Linwood A. Hanson, "Choosing Literature," The Leaflet, May, 1969,p.10.

[3]In Drake, North Dakota, in 1974 copies of Slaughterhouse Five were burned after removal from classes. In Kanakawha County, West Va. in 1975 parents violently protested against a new series of language arts materials.

English teachers. Research has documented these incidents, the reasons for objections, and the outcomes of the incidents. What we need now is a better understanding of how most parents actually feel. This is especially important now that school boards are applying the Supreme Court's decision on pornography that community standards must be the final arbiters. This very ruling was used in 1974 in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, to justify the removal of Slaughterhouse Five after a single parent conplained.[4] Therefore, the question becomes imperative: is the single objecting parent the tip of an iceberg or an island unto himself?

This study was designed to provide a description of the attitudes of a sample of parents from a selected community toward the content of materials in senior high school English classes. Also examined are general attitudes about the purposes of literature in the classroom. Hopefully, the results can be of benefit to teachers in making curricular and materials decisions and in forming policies to deal with censorship attempts.

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[4]"Teacher Withdraws Novel from Class," Minneapolis Star, April 16, 1975 Sec. B, p. 4.

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Censorship

The history of censorship dates primarily from the seventeenth century when the printing press and increased literacy made books available to more than the clergy and upper classes, who promptly decided that everyone else's "moral fiber" needed protection.[5] Censorship was a simple matter then because printing was licensed privilege, but licensing soon ended, and the end of the seventeenth century saw both England and America establish the publishing of obscene material as a common-law crime. Since then courts have struggled with definitions of obscenity and the issue of freedom of speech and freedom of press. Censorship was not, however, much of a concern for schools with their very classic curricula until public education both expanded and changed.

The first rash of censorship attempts in American schools involved politics. Specifically, the Civil War made both Northerners and Southerners very particular about the schools' history books. The issue was so explosive that most publishers resorted to printing two versions of their history texts. Throughout the 1800's

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[5]Charles Rembar, "You Can't Show That on TV," Triangle Publications, Ocober, 1974, p. 33

and 1900's social studies' texts have continued to be under attack, more so than English books. For the most part these censors were organized groups, not individual parents, who were often successful in getting legislatures to ban specific texts or ideas from the schools. The result was and is that school officials are very cautious, "a factor publishers cannot afford to ignore when preparing books for distribution. . . . The expense of producing a book is too high, many of them believe, to take chances on content which might offend potential buyers."[6]

How did the English teacher apparently escape these problems for so long? Two factors seem to be most responsible. For one, until the late 1950's, the study of literature was more a history of classical authors than a study of relevant themes of both venerable and contemporary literature.[7] Obscenity laws often kept the contemporary author from being published until long after he was contemporary (witness, for example, Dreiser's struggles just to get a thousand copies of Sister Carrie printed). Not until the 1930's did the American Booksellers Association even begin to consider an anti-censorship stand. In other words, for many years modern, controversial literature was neither part of the English curriculum nor was it readily available.

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[6]Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, The Censors and the Schools (Canada: Little, Brown and Co., 1963), p. 179.

[7]Frank Rice, English and Its Teaching (Professional Education Series, 1972), p. 14.

Secondly, a lot of pre-censorship existed. With anthologies as the mainstay of English classrooms, publishers had the same fears of economic loss if the texts were offensive. "Anthologies of English and American literature are often affected by the same fear of controversy. Works by many widely acclaimed novelists, poets and playwrights are not found in today's anthologies. . . . Publishers find it safer to fill their texts with works safely removed from the twentieth century. . . ."[8] Thus, the nature of the curricula and the almost exclusive use of anthologies seem to have kept angry parents from the teachers' doors. Of course, other factors are probably also involved, such as teacher education and tenure laws, but data is only speculative in these areas.

After researching the history of school censorship, Nelson and Roberts concluded that "while today's textbook battles are among the most widespread and serious to hit this country, they are not without deep roots in history."[9] Two questions naturally arise: How widespread is the problem of censorship of English materials and why does the problem exist?

Research Findings

Although censorship has existed as long as books have, systematic reporting and study of the problem in schools has been most active in the last fifteen years.

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[8]Nelson and Roberts, p. 182-183

[9]Nelson and Roberts, p. 22.

Prior to that time, knowledge of the extent of censorship has to be obtained by more indirect indices. One such index of the growth of both the problem and the research is that in 1929, when the Education Index was first published, there was only one article on censorship listed; by 1965 there were lengthy bibliographies.[10] Or, since 1940 Library Literature, a comprehensive index that includes non-library material, has experienced a steady increase in both the number and percentage of censorship citations.[11] In 1953 the National Council of Teachers of English, believing that the wave of attacks on social studies' materials presented a threat to English teachers, (even though "relatively few" books had been banned from English classrooms) published Censorship and Controversy.[12] By 1962 their fears were materializing, and the NCTE felt compelled to publish The Students' Right to Read. Finally, at their 1974 convention, the NCTE passed a resolution "On Confronting Censorship." In part, the resolution reads:

> Educators and school board members are being abused and harassed, and therefore intimidated in exercising their professional judgment in the best interests of their pupils because such attacks are based on emotion rather than reason . . . and create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust in which learning is hampered. . . .RESOLVED that NCTE reassert its position on the student's right to read, and Be it further RESOLVED that NCTE inform its members of the

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[10] Lee A. Burress, "Censorship and the Public Schools," Freedom of Inquiry (Washington, D.C.: American Library Association, 1965), p. 20

[11] Jerome B. Simpson, "Censorship: The Profession's Response," Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, July, 1964, p. 41

[12] Censorship and Controversy (Chicago: National Council of Teachers of English, 1953), p. 51

> dangers involved in instructional materials-centered attacks and of appropriate actions they may take as situations warrant.[13]

This growing concern is not just because of the few incidents that gain massive publicity; rather, careful research has revealed that censorship of language arts materials is widespread and, perhaps, growing.

Incidence of Censorship

After the publication of The Students' Right to Read, the NCTE asked affiliates to report on censorship experiences. The Utah Council was one of few to present a statistical report at that time. Based on a 1963 survey of 160 high school English teachers or chairpersons, 67 percent of the high schools and 20 percent of the junior high schools "reported definite incidents and a number of others reported 'minor skirmishes.'"[14] Most of the incidents were initiated by individual parents rather than organized groups. Following the Utah report, at least four major studies (1963, 1967, 1968, 1973) of censorship in high school English programs were undertaken. Each reported similar and disquieting results.

In 1963 the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English supported research by Lee Burress into censorship in their public schools.[15] Burress distributed the "Questionnaire Concerning Censorship Pressures on Wisconsin Teachers" to 914 public school administrators, 47 percent

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[13]"Convention Wrap-up," English Journal, January, 1975, p.29

[14]"Affiliates Study the Censorship Issues," Council-Grams. Sept.10, 1963, p.14

[15]How Censorship Affects the Schools, Wisconsin Council of Teachers Special Bulletin No. 8 (Oshkosh; The Council, 1963).

of whom responded, and to 724 public school English teachers, of whom 25 percent responded. Thus, his results were based on approximately 600 returns.

In analyzing the data, Burress found that the following:

> Approximately one-fifth of all the returns reported a specific request to remove a book or magazine from use or from a recommended list during the two years prior to the study . . . . A major conclusion was that a substantial proportion of the teachers in Wisconsin feel the continuing presence of censorship pressures, and have experienced, or expect to experience, an overt expression of that pressure. (p.2)

The majority of the objectors were parents, although about one-fourth of the objections were from teachers or librarians. However, these pressures were reported to be less severe than those from outside the school.

In 1965 Nyla Ahrens conducted a study similar to Burress', but on a larger scale.[16] She surveyed 939 secondary English teachers from across the country. Of 616 respondents, 78 or 12.6 percent replied affirmatively to the question: "During the past two years, has anyone specifically objected to, or asked for the removal of, any book(s) which you personally have used or proposed using in the English courses you teach?" The percentage of such incidents was higher when senior high school respondents were isolated. Of all reported incidents, 77.5 percent concerned books used at the senior high school level. While Ahrens does not speculate on the reasons for this situation, it is likely that as English classes penetrate more deeply into adult, con-

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[16] Censorship and the Teacher of English: A Questionnaire Survey of a Selected Sample of Secondary School Teachers of English (Ann Arbou: Columbia University, 1965).

emporary themes, the likelihood of parental objections increases.

The objectors in Ahrens study were, again, mainly from outside the school; 51 percent were individual parents and 14 percent were teachers or librarians. The rest generally consisted of clergymen and local organizations. Finally, objections were not confined to any certain types of communities; but they "were reported from all sections of the country . . . and many kinds of schools and communities." (p. 88)

Conditions in Arizona were surveyed in 1968 by Kenneth Donelson.[17] Ninety out of 103 schools (87 percent) and 168 out of 253 teachers (67 percent) responded. Forty-four percent of the schools reported at least one censorship incident, and 46 percent of the individual teachers reported direct or indirect attempts at censorship, the majority of which were initiated by parents. Moreover, 103 teachers (61 percent) said that they do worry about censorship in their schools.

Perhaps the problem of censorship is no more evident than in Rollin Douma's 1973 study of censorship in the Michigan public schools.[18] Of 127 English department chairpersons responding, 50.4 percent had faced objections to or had been asked to remove at least one book used in an English class or recommended to the student. Again, parental objectors far outranked other categories. Therefore, whatever the situation was prior to these studies, there can be little doubt that

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[17] "Censorship and the Arizona Schools," Arizona English Bulletin, February, 1969.

[18] Book Selection Policies, Book Complaint Policies and Censorship in Selected Michigan Public Schools (University of Michigan, 1973)

censorship is a very real problem for English teachers today.

Reasons for Objections

To what did all these parents object? All of the above studies produced nearly the same lists of objections. The main causes of complaint were language, sex and immorality, religion, race, politics, and inappropriate adolescent behavior. In this area, Burress observed that "in the opinion of teachers reporting, an additional group of objectors had hidden motives; thought they apparently were objecting to the language or morality of a book, they were in reality objecting to the ideas" (p. 4). Donelson also argued that, though language is the stated objection, it may be a cover for the real complaint especially for "attacks on the different dialect or culture of a minority group . . . . This was true of a campaign of censorship aimed at John Howard Griffin's Black Like Me"(Donelson, 1972, p. 1194). On the other hand, in Rochester, Michigan, Slaughterhouse Five was challenged in court as anti-religious, and thus, its use violated the principle of separation of church and state (that is, schools can favor neither religion nor anti-religion). William Banach (1973), however, in his analysis of the controversy argued that "the basic premise--that the schools were using a book injurious to Christian beliefs--did not significantly affect the community. Instead, the community was affected by expletives pulled from context . . . ."[19] Obviously, we need more exact information on exactly what parents fear in books and why.

Effects of Censorship

While it is clear, then, that censorship attempts face many teachers, the effects emphasize the seriousness of the problem.

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[19]"Intellectual Freedom and the Community," School Media Quarterly, 1 (1973), p. 125

While violent protests and book burnings are not the norm, other results cannot be minimized. The immediate effect is often the removal of the objectionable book. One-fourth of the Michigan schools surveyed had removed at least one book (Douma, 1973), 43 of 175 books were removed, banned lost, or hidden in Arizona (Donelson, 1968), and 41 of 111 books were removed or retained with a different method of use in the schools Ahrens studied.

But removal in one school is just the beginning as a "ripple effect" sets in. Burress discovered that much self-censorship existed to "avoid trouble" (p. 6). To be safe from objectors and problems, teachers often restrict students to "safe" books, and the students end up "impoverished" rather than "enriched."[20] Edward Gordon (1969) sums up the situation:

> There are no national statistics on censorship, of course, nor can there be. But educators who have studied the phenomenon believe that it extends far wider than any recitation of examples could ever indicate. They point out that when public clamor takes a book away in one school, the same book will disappear quietly in hundreds of other schools which do not want to take chances.[21]

Curricular Causes

While censorship has long existed, the apparent increases can be at least partially attributed in changes in English curricula. As was previously discussed, teachers formerly relied almost exclusively on anthologies and their classic surveys of literary history. Now, contemporary literature is gaining prominence, and that may be a major root of the problem.

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[20]Robert F. Hogan, "Book Selection and Censorship," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, April, 1967, p. 73.

[21]"Censorship Is Disrupting our Schools," The Leaflet, May, 1969, p. 4.

That modern literature use in increasing is abundantly clear. "Censorship studies in Wisconsin suggest, and individual reports from across the country confirm,that teachers are aware of and inclined to use much contemporary and frequently controversial literature" (Burress, 1965, p. 492). Also, James Doran's 1970 study showed that 95 percent of teachers surveyed favored using contemporary literature and that most teachers do make extensive use of it.[22]

This change is partially due to the increased availability of inexpensive paperbacks rather than anthologies; the Ahrens study reported that more than two-thirds of the objectionable books were in paperback form. Burress strongly argued for the tie between paperbacks and increasing censorship attempts:

> One of the instructional improvements of immediate concern to censorship is the use of books otherthan texts. . . . It has been a natural accompaniment of the rise of teacher preparation that much use has been made in the schools of nontextbooks. . . . The militancy of the teachers may also be seen in greater use of contemporary and controversial books than was true in the past. . . . (p. 21).

The publisher's dilemma is now partially solved! For the cost of one heavy anthology, he can print a number of paperbacks without having to worry so much about not offending any one.

The "problem" is that modern literature deals with modern problems in contemporary terms. Today's adolescent is "more likely to enter the real world of . . . . drugs, racism,school dropouts, alcoholism pregnancy, early marriage, divorce, sex, high school gangs, and Vietman" (Donelson, p. 1193). To avoid such subjects, to choose "clean" books only, is to ignore what is relevant to today's teenagers. And, since language is the number one complaint of parents, it is not likely to disappear with the use of modern literature because "it does appear that

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[22]Contemporary Novels and Plays in the Senior High School Curriculum (Rutgers State University, 1970), p. 19.

today's quest for 'honesty' results in far more obscenity in our literature than previously."[23]

The tie of modern literature to a rise in censorship is not just speculative or coincidental Ahrens reported that 76 percent of the censored books were published after 1920 and 53 percent were published since 1940. The controversy in Michigan over Slaughterhouse Five is an excellent case in point.

> The complaints were generated when the school system broke from its traditional manner of teaching English and attempted to structure courses more meaningful by using the ten-week course, or mini-course concept, including classes such as contemporary literature, current literature, black literature, and Shakespeare. . . .to allow students to identify basic trends and characteristics in contemporary literature.[24]

Kenneth Donelson sums up the entire situation with some "truths" about censorship:. . .

> (1) Censorship almost always arises from the study of contemporary literature.
> (2) Almost any modern literature is censorable by someone, somewhere, sometime, somehow
> (3) Any English teacher worthy of the name is likely to encounter the censor, if he teaches modern literature worth the time and effort. (Donelson, 1974,p.14)

Perhaps exacerbating the situation, English teachers are also making greater use of films. Donelson reported that the use of films that depict disturbing aspects of life is increasing, and "we will surely see many other censorship incidents involving short films as they become more widely accepted by teachers" (1972, p. 1196).

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[23]Richard H. Escott, "Intellectual Freedom and the School Administrator, "School Media Quarterly, 1 (1973), p. 119.

[24]Harry Jones and Ray Lawson, "Intellectual Freedom and Materials Selection, "School Media Quarterly. 1 (1973), p. 116

Summary of Review

Censorship predominated in the social studies arena long before language arts experienced widespread criticism. Precensorship, economics, and curricular organization combined to defer censorship problems with parents. Nevertheless, those objections probably have been experienced, but recording of them did not begin in earnest until the problem was too frequent to ignore. In the past twelve years, careful surveys reported, in chronological order, censorship rates of 20 percent, 13 percent, 46 percent, and 50 percent. Language and morality have been the main causes of complaint.

A concurrent development that appears to be linked to parental objections is an increased use of paperbacks and contemporary literature by English teachers. Other factors may be involved (for example, teacher education and teacher rights), but these have not been documented. Finally, the use of short films may be opening the door to more censorship incidents for modern English teachers.

Conclusion

Clearly, then, complaints by parents about language arts materials should be a major area of concern for all English teachers. Across the nation, books are being removed because of complaints by a few parents. But the question arises as to how other parents would feel about the book or its removal. The answer to this question is difficult to find. Even in Michigan, with a highly publicized court battle, it was difficult for the school board to determine exactly where the "silent majority" stood--generally, only the strong proponents and opponents of censorship were heard.[25] Despite the fact that parents

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[25]Banach, p. 125

have such influence, there is little research about their attitudes (as opposed to surveys of in-school personnel). We must start to understand more clearly the positions of the parents as a whole on the issues confronting language arts today. This study attempts to uncover some of those positions.

CHAPTER II

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

An attitude survey was conducted in the fall of 1974 among the parents of sophomores from Coon Rapids High School, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, for the following purposes: (1) to ascertain attitudes and opinions about the content of high school English materials and about the role of high school literature in general; (2) to ascertain if attitudesdiffered according to the medium (print versus film); (3) to determine a general picture of the community's level of tolerance or intolerance toward selected subjects in English programs; (4) to determine if attitudes of parents differed according to the sex, age, or education level.

Assumptions

Basic attitudes of the author should be noted here. I generally oppose censorship and believe that a teacher's professional judgment should be respected. I qualify my oppositon to censorship in light of my own biases. For example, while I would oppose the attempts of a racist to remove A Raisin in the Sun, I probably wouldn't want my children to be assigned a book that promotes racism. Therefore, I accept that both parental and student rights exist, and I also recognize the duty of a teacher to offer alternative materials to an individual student who himself or whose parents object to assigned materials. While these issues could be discussed at length, this study is not concerned with issues from the teachers' perspective.

Community Description

The survey population comes from a homogeneous community in the second ring of suburbs around the large metroplitan area of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The community is fairly new with recent, dramatic population increases. In a single decade (1950-1960), the population rose from just under 2500 to 15,000. Between 1960 and 1970, the population doubled to a figure in excess of 30,000 people. Half of the population is under 18 years of age.[26]

Most homes are less than fifteen years old and fall into the $20,000 to $40,000 price range. The community is generally blue-collar, lower-middle class. A distribution curve of the community would be strongly skewed in favor of the lower income ends, but there are no serious pockets of poverty.

The people are almost 100 percent white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant, including a substantial Baptist population; also, there is a strong Catholic population.

While the area elects Democrats, the officials elected espouse conservative Democratic principles and stress issues of taxation, labor, and traditional values (for example, the area's Congressman, a Democrat, was given wide support because of an anti-abortion stance). There is a definite, very conservative group in the community that gains much publicity by its attempts to regulate pornography at magazine racks and movie theaters. The size of their following, however, is unknown.

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[26] Welcome to Coon Rapids (City of Coon Rapids, 1975), p. 3

Population and Sample

The population consisted of the parents of all sophomores at Coon Rapids High School. This population was chosen for several reasons; first, since most censorship cases concern senior high school materials, their parents are of prime concern; secondly, parents of tenth graders were assumed to have the most immediate or strongest interest in the senior high program because their children were to be enrolled for over two more years (as opposed to parents whose children would be graduating soon); and, thirdly, since I identified myself as a tenth grade English teacher and, hence could be each student's teacher, I hoped that incentive to respond would be greater: parents could voice their opinions to someone directly involved in designing the tenth grade program, as well as the entire English department's program. After assigning a number to each sophomore, a list of random numbers was used to draw a sample of 225 names (28.5 percent) from 780 names in the population.

The Questionnaire

In investigating attitudes in a sensitive area, it is difficult to ensure that the instrument measures exactly what it proposes to measure. For a number of reasons, however, face-to-face interviews were not feasible. This survey was structured to raise questions about broad issues and about the appropriateness of specific content in high school English books and films.

Questions were drawn to be in line with the principles supported in The Student's Right to Read. Some of the key ideas which were formulated into questions are as follows:

> We oppose efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large. The right of

> any individual not just to read but to read whatever he wants to read is basic to democratic society. . . . In effect, the reading man is freed from the bonds of discovering all things and all facts and all truths through his own direct experiences, for his reading allows him to meet people, debate philosophies, and experience events far beyond the narrow confines of his own existance. . . . The value and impact of any literary work must be examined as a whole and not in part--the impact of the entire work being more important than the words, phrases, or incidents out of which it is made. . . . The community that entrust students to the care of an English teacher should also trust that teacher to exercise professional judgment in selecting or recommending books.[27]

Also, I am indebted to the work of Charles Busha, who did a similar study of censorship attitudes among librarians. A number of his questions were easily adaptable to this study.

The Questions were designed to meet two criteria; to elicit responses that reflect or relate to an attitude toward censorship and to show differentiation among respondents whose views would vary along a continuum from opposition to censorship to approval of censorship. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

Scoring the Responses

Nineteen of the twenty items on the survey met the first criteria of being indicators of tolerant or intolerant attitudes (item number six was considered neutral). These items were dichotomous questions requiring aresponse of either "agree" or "disagree", to which were appended "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" to help

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[27] Kenneth L. Donelson (Orbana; NCTE Committiee on Publication, 1972,) p. 7-8.

meet the second criteria of differentiating responses along a continuum. A "no opinion" response was also included. These five choices served as the test of the degree of censor-proneness for each question.

Each response was given a numerical value to facilitate a scoring system. All responses were scored so that the response least favorable to censorship was assigned a value of one, and the response most favorable to censorship was assigned a value of five. Note two examples:

Item 18. A teacher should use a book even if, while the whole suits the purposes of the course, parts of it are objectionable to parents.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Item 17. High school students should not be asked to read books about teenagers involved with drugs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)

These numbers were not put on the surveys themselves. After each question was scored, they were totalled to produce and overall "censor-proneness" score. Under this system, the higher the score, the more censor-prone the respondent was assumed to be.

Hypotheses

In the analysis of data, the following null hypotheses will be tested (at the .05 level of significance):

1. There will be no significant differences between the number of persons scoring above an established neutral point and those scoring below it.
2. There will be no significant differences between censorship scores and the variable of sex.
3. There will be no significant differences between censorship scores and the variable of age.
4. There will be no significant differences between censorship scores and the variable of education.
5. There will be no significant differences between attitudes and the variable of medium (print versus film).

The Variables

The variable of sex was, of course, categorized into male and female. The age variable was divided into eight levels in the survey itself; under 30, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, and 60 and above. In the analysis of the data, the age categories were grouped into three levels: under 40, 40-49, and 50 and over. Three educational attainment levels were established: not a high school graduate, a high school graduate, and a high school graduate with advanced education at a college or business or technical school.

Definitions

Several definitions were established:

Censorship: an essentially negative act involving the use of non-professional criteria and procedures to suppress, proscribe, or repress books (Douma, p. 3).

Objection: a complaint against a book's use or content, usually made

with the intention of having the book removed.

Tolerant: to allow to be done without active opposition: to concede the right to opinions and participation.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited in a number of ways. First, the population was a specific, fairly homogeneous community. It would be difficult to determine to what extent results can be generalized to other types of communities. Secondly, closed-form questions were used. While parents were given the opportunity to comment (and many did), interpreting exactly what each subject meant by an answer was restricted.

Pilot-Testing the Questionnaire

A preliminary draft of the survey was designed after research and consultations. A pilot survey was sent to five parents, known to be of varying political and religious persuasions. Included with the servey were questions to evaluate the survey and the instructions. (see Appendix-B). All five surveys and evaluations were returned, and the evaluations showed no significant problems with interpreting or answering the questions. The survey was also submitted to administrators for their suggestions. As a result, the initial survey was subjected to minor revisions. The final survey consisted of twenty statements to which respondents would agree or disagree. Subjects were also asked to identify themselves by sex, age, and education; otherwise they were to remain anonymous.

Mailing and Return of Surveys

A cover letter was attached to the one-page survey. The letter, not on school stationary, identified me as the investigator, explained the general purpose of the study (without using the word "censorship"),

and promised confidentiality. It also gave my phone number if subjects wanted further information, and finally, the letter offered to send the results to anyone interested in examining them. (See Appendix-A for a copy of the cover letter.)

Questionnaires were mailed to the subjects in November of 1974, complete with cover letter and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope. After a three week period, follow-up letters were sent to all parents through their sons or daughters. (Initial letters were not coded in any way because I believed that the promise of anonymity and confidentiality should be scrupulously adhered to since I was the teacher of some of the subjects' children. Therefore, I could not identify the returned surveys.)

Of 225 questionnaires mailed out to subjects, 155 or 69 percent were returned and all were usable. (Sixty-nine percent is considered a high rate of return.[28]) In terms of the education level, those returning the surveys do not accurately reflect the community: the respondents are characterized by a higher level of education than would be true of the population at large. (refer to Table III).

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[28]Bernard C. Hennessy, Public Opinion (Belmont, California: Auxberg Press, 1970), p. 112.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

General Tolerance Levels

The first major finding is that the overall attitude of the community is significantly more tolerant than intolerant in regard to the issues raised by the survey. As previously described, each subject's answers were scored to produce a "censor-proneness" score ranging from the lowest possible of nineteen to the highest possible of ninety-five. A low score is indicative of high tolerance; a high score is indicative of a non-tolerant attitude, Table I and Graph I present the distribution of scores.

The significant standard of measurement is the midpoint of the possible range of scores or the most neutral score, namely 57.5. Since value judgments are applied to the answers characterizing them as tolerant or intolerant, there is a standard by which the results can be analyzed. Thus, I can compare the responses not only to each other, but to an objective, neutral score. This neutral score of 57.5 is obtained by determining the midpoint of the range of scores possible (95-19+1): the most tolerant score possible is 19; the most intolerant score possible is 95. Put another way, if a subject's responses were all "no opinion," indicating neither proneness toward nor away from censorship, each answer would have a value of three and the total score would be 57 (or 57.5 statistcally). Therefore, scores below 57.5 fall into the tolerant or non-censor-prone category. Using this measure, 38 percent of the subjects may be characterized as intolerant, and 62 percent may be

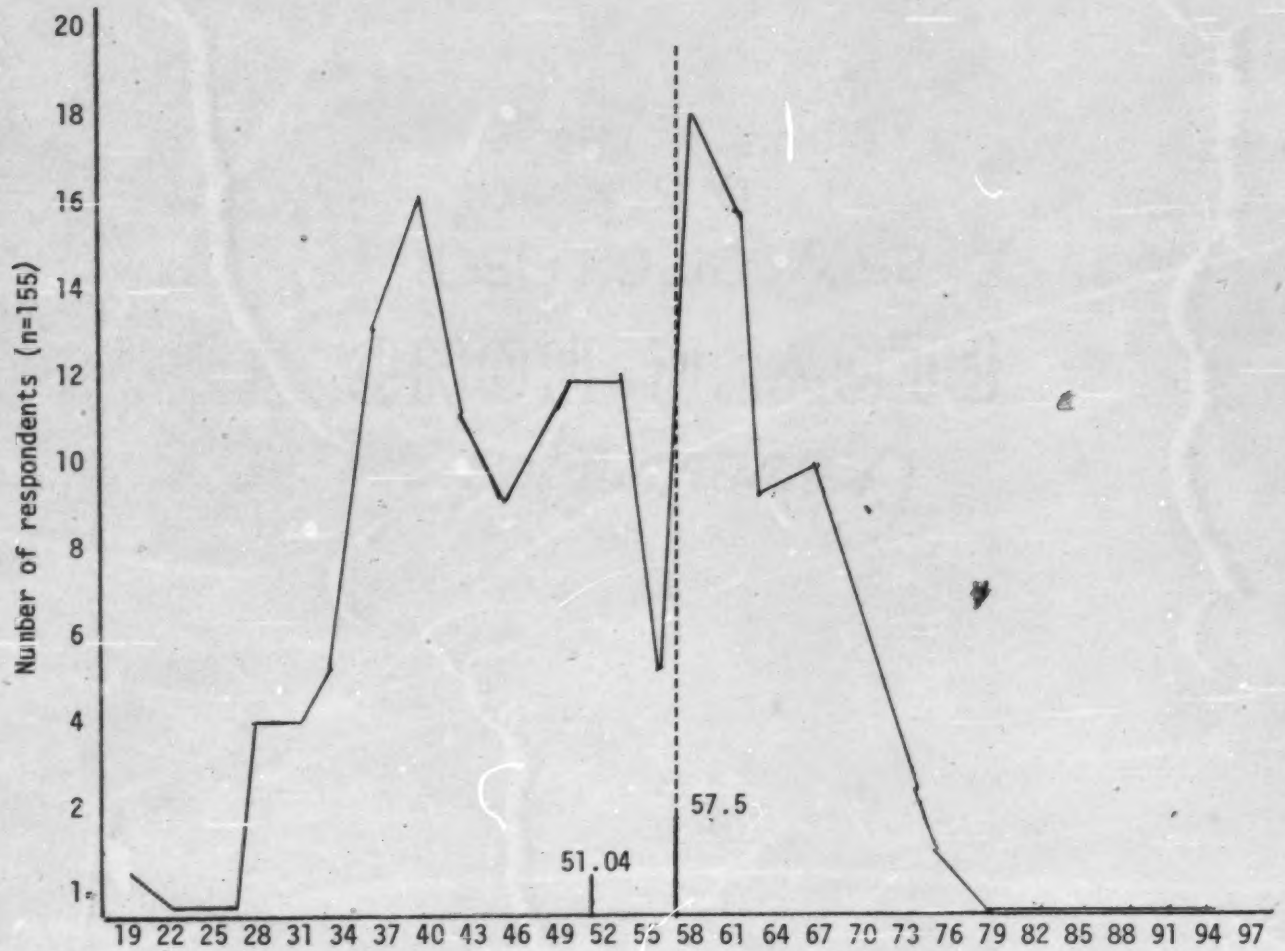
TABLE I

Distribution of Survey Scores

Score	Freq.	Cum. Freq.	Score	Freq.	Cum. Freq.	Score	Freq.	Cum. Freq.
95	0		65	5	23	35	3	144
94	0		64	1	24	34	2	146
93	0		63	5	29	33	0	146
92	0		62	3	32	32	0	146
91	0		61	7	39	31	2	148
90	0		60	6	45	30	2	150
89	0		59	9	54	29	2	152
88	0		58	5	59	28	1	153
87	0		57	4	63	27	1	154
86	0		56	3	66	26	0	154
85	0		55	1	67	25	0	154
84	0		54	1	68	24	0	154
83	0		53	3	71	23	0	154
82	0		51	2	80	21	0	154
81	0		51	2	80	21	0	154
80	0		50	3	83	19	1	155
79	0		49	3	86			
78	0		48	6	92			
77	0		47	2	94			
76	1	1	46	5	99			
75	0	1	45	2	101			
74	0	1	44	6	107			
73	1	2	43	4	111			
72	1	3	42	1	112			
71	3	6	41	8	120			
70	0	6	40	6	126			
69	4	10	39	2	128			
68	3	13	38	5	133			
67	4	17	37	5	138			
66	3	20	36	3	141			

GRAPH I

Distributution of Survey Scores



Total scores on attitude survey (grouped by 3's)

Lowest score possible: 19
Highest score possible: 95
Mean score: 51.04
Neutral score: 57.5

described as tolerant. Table II summarizes this data. The mean score of 51.04 also falls on the tolerant side of the distribution.

Using this data, the null hypothesis was tested and rejected. Hypothesis: in the population distribution, the scores will be equally divided above and below an established neutral point. With 155 scores, the expected frequency was 77.5 scores both above and below 57.5. Using the chi-square test, I found that the obtained frequencies of 59 and 96 are statistically significant at the .005 level (X^2 equals 8.36).

This picture of the dominance of a tolerant attitude is also borne out when scores close to the neutral point are excluded. That is, instead of dividing the subjects into two groups, finer distinctions may be made by dividing them into five groups ranging from very tolerant to very intolerant. This seems especially appropriate since the subjects were given the opportunity to respond to each question along a five point continuum.

To determine the five groups, I divided the range of scores possible into five groups: 19 to 28.5 to 47.5, 47.5 to 66.5, 66.5 to 88.5, and 85.5 to 95. These groups correspond to the scores subjects would have if their answers to each question had an average value of one, two, three, four, or five. Recall that one point was assigned to very tolerant answers, five points to very intolerant answers. Table III presents this data. Once the middle group of neutral scores is excluded, the results still show that the tolerant position is clearly favored by 50 percent to eleven percent, and no one falls into the very intolerant category.

These results are of important practical significance. Here are data to support the contention that those, at least in this

community, who promote censorship efforts probably do not represent a "silent majority," but, rather, a definite minority. (However, this generalization will be qualified somewhat when I examine specific question rather than general attitudes.) This information can be especially useful if the objector tries to apply the Supreme Court ruling on pornography to assert that community standards justify removal of certain books from schools. Now there is some evidence that those standards are tolerant ones.

In comparing scores according to the variables of sex, age, and education, a second finding is that the hypotheses are not rejected: there are no significant differences between the mean scores of the subgroups in each category (see Table III). That is, neither sex, age, nor education level resulted in significantly different attitudes as reflected by the survey scores for respondents in the various groups. But, there does seem to be a generally held assumption that intolerance or censorproneness is greater among women than men, among the old than the young, and among the poorly educated than the well-educated. This survey suggests that stereotype may be exaggerated.

However, it is true that the difference between those who are not high school graduates and those who are graduates of a post high school program approaches a level of significance (z-score = 1.47). Perhaps a larger number of respondents in the lower education group(there were seven in the study) could provide the data to clearly confirm or deny a significant difference in attitudes. As to age difference because of the nature of the population, most subjects had attended high school prior to 1950. It would be

TABLE II

Distribution of Survey Scores by Five Levels

Range of Scores	Interpretation	Number	Percent
19.0 - 28.5	Very tolerant	3	1.9%
28.5 - 47.5	Tolerant	75	48.4
47.5 - 66.5	Neutral	60	38.7
66.5 - 85.5	Intolerant	17	10.9
85.5 - 95.0	Very intolerant	0	0

interesting to see if a sample of graduates from the last two decades would show significantly more tolerance than the surveyed parents. Finally, the only account I can offer for the lack of different attitudes between the sexes is that either the sterotype is blatantly false or the role of parent takes priority and blurs sex distinctions. In any case, it is worth noting that for all of the subgroups, the mean scores were on the tolerant side of the neutral point: old or young, male or female, highly educated or not, people were generally tolerant.

Film versus Print

Besides the study of general attitudes, the survey also sought to compare attitudes toward topics dealt with in print and in films. Six pairs of questions covered the following subjects: objectionable language (questions 3 and 8), sexual relationships (Questions 13 and 20), anti-religious viewpoints (questions 10 and 14), violence (questions 2 and 5), the use of drugs (questions 9 and 17), and the presence of Black characters (questions 4 and 16). Table V compares the proportion of intolerant responses about the inclusion of these subjects in books and films in high school English classes.

The somewhat surprising result (surprising to me, at least) is that in every case the subjects were more tolerant about these topics as part of films than as part of books. The difference is especially noteworthy in the case of objectionable language: The shift of objectors from 61 percent to 49 percent is statistically significant at the .05 level (the difference yields a z-score of 1.96).

I can only speculate about the reason for such a shift of attitude. One consideration must be that the questions were not

TABLE III

Mean Survey Scores

Group	Number	Percent	Mean Score
All	155	100%	51.04
Male	38	24.5	50.47
Female	117	75.5	51.22
Under 39	81	52.3	50.63
40 - 49	61	39.4	50.97
50 and over	13	8.3	53.92
Not High School Graduate	7	4.5	56.43
High School Graduate	91	58.7	49.58
Post High School Graduate	57	36.8	49.58

worded identically except for the substitution of "film" for "book". This was done to avoid subjects easily perceiving that the questions are looking for a comparison. It was hoped that variations in wording would make respondents think through each question rather than automatically give the same response. The questions on objectionable language demonstrate how the questions differ:

> 3. There is no good excuse for a teacher asking high school students to read books with language that is generally considered foul, vulgar, or blasphemous.
>
> 8. A film with language that is generally considered foul, vulgar, or blasphemous should be shown to high school students.

While there are differences, both questions define objectionable language in the same way and both contain strong, universal objections ("no good excuse" and "never").

Aside from wording differences, what can account for the results? Perhaps parents are more familiar with school books than films (they are not brought home), and, therefore, they are less sure of themselves. Or, because film is transitory, parents may not believe its effects are as lasting. Perhaps, because the films are used by schools, parents think of them as educational films designed for student audiences, whereas objectionable books are usually paperbacks written for adult readers. Also, the constant presence of television and movies could be making people more immune to or tolerant of the sounds of objectionable language, but they still are concerned about a child reading the words. Whatever the reason for differing attitudes, it is an intriguing situation worthy of further, more detailed investigation.

Individual Questions

Examination of the distribution of responses to individual

TABLE IV

Censor-prone Responses About Selected Subjects in Print or Film

Subject	Level of censor-prone responses		Amount of Change
	Books No. %	Films No. %	
questionable language	94 61%	76 49%	12%
sexual relationship	72 46%	64 41%	5%
violence	33 21%	25 16%	5%
Black characters	9 6%	1 1%	5%
drug use	12 8%	7 5%	3%
anti-religious viewpoints	60 39%	58 37%	2%

quesions reveals both the expected and the surprising. The picture that emerges is of a community both united and divided. At least two-thirds of the respondents had the same opinion on ten questions. Yet, on the other ten, opinion was divided.

Of the nineteen questions whose responses could be categorized as tolerant or intolerant (all but number six), in only six cases did the intolerant side prevail (three of these times by over 50 percent), while in thirteen cases the tolerant position was preferred (eleven of these times by over 50 percent). Perhaps the most important questions, then, are the three on which over half of the respondents professed a conservative attitude.

The questions with the greatest conservative response was item number one:

1. Books assigned to high school students should reflect the values of the community.

SA	A	N	D	SD
10%	56%	11%	19%	3%
	66%		22%	

The difference between those who agree and those who disagree on this question is statistically significant at the .005 level (X^2 = 33.5). The question is, obviously, very broad and agreement does not necessarily indicate strong censorproneness.

It is perfectly understandable that parents want their values reinforced in the educational system that they support ; but, such an attitude could open the way for narrow curriculum and a lack of opportunity for young people to explore and evaluate alternative value systems within and without our culture. Even then, which values would have priority? For example, most Americans profess to value

independence (their children do not have to do what everyone else does), and, yet, they also value respect for law and country. Would an English teacher be right or wrong, then, to teach Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience?"

Also, this question, like the Supreme Court ruling, raises the difficult problem of determining community values or standards. If they could be determined, would majority rule decide the standard or would protecting the rights of the minority require that materials reflect value held by all? Obviously, the question presents a thicket of problems

Does the community's response to this question mean that they want narrow curriculum? The answer is not to be found in this question but in the others in which the respondents more clearly establish what they do value. The other questions show that the subjects do not mean to imply that only community values should be presented in the schools. Items twelve and fifteen, for example, support this contention.

12. The purpose of literature in high school is to present the most socially accepted point of view, not all points of view.

SA	A	N	D	SD
1%	17%	6%	52%	24%

18% 76% (Significant at .005 level: X^2 = 57.1)*

15. Teachers should be especially watchful to see that books with unorthodox or extreme views are kept from high school students.

SA	A	N	D	SD
5%	27%	10%	48%	11%

32% 59% (Significant at .005 level: X^2 = 12.6)*

Apparently, the respondents, while desiring a reflection of

*X^2 is obtained by comparing the sum of those who agree with the sum of those who disagree.

community values in the classroom experience recognize the need to present other points of view (unless they fear that the most socially accepted point of view is not their point of view). Similarly, over half the respondents do not see the need to over-protect students from extreme views. As some people commented, their only fear is that extreme views may be presented to the exclusion of all others.

The question with the second-most intolerant response was, not surprisingly, the one about objectionable language.

3. There is no good excuse for a teacher asking high school students to read books with language that is generally considered foul, vulgar, or blasphemous.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
35%	26%	5%	29%	5%	
61%			34%		(Significant at .005 level: $X^2 = 11.4$)*

Note that the greatest response was in strong agreement with the statement, whereas, those who disagree did not do so with as much vehemence. Also, the "no opinion" response of 5 percent was one of the lowest in the survey. Thus, people have definite opinions about objectionable language, and the weight of opinion is still censor-prone. This finding is consistent with the surveys of censorship incidence which name language as the number one cause of complaint.

The third question that elicted a conservative response of over 50 percent was item nineteen:

19. There is a definite need in our society for the efforts of civic-minded or religious groups that work to keep

* X^2 is obtained by comparing the sum of those who agree with the sum of those who disagree.

our schools free of immoral literature.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
22%	32%	14%	19%	12%	
54%			31%		(Significant at .005 levels: $X^2 = 9.2$)*

The response indicates that many people are concerned about materials available in schools and feel the need to rely on more than the judgment of the professional staff. Perhaps this is part of a general trend away from confidence in our institutions, or, perhaps, it is a sign of an education system that lacks communication with parents. But, whatever the cause, the growth of such groups in adversary positions would be an unfortunate development. This is not to say that parental support would not be welcome.

On the more positive side, questions in which respondents are more or less unified in supporting a noncensor-prone position are more numerous. Again, the differences will be statistically significant.

An expected, but nonetheless gratifying, result is the attitude toward literature with Black characters:

4. Books with mainly Black characters deserve a place in the high school English curriculum.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
30%	55%	9%	5%	1%	
85%			6%		(Significant at .005 level: $X^2 = 107.3$)*

Some people commented that there should be no need to even ask such a question. Of course, it is possible that people chose not to express their true feelings because prejudice is "out of style."

On the question of literature dealing with drug use, there was a high level of agreement.

* X^2 is obtained by comparing the sum of those who agree with the sum of those who disagree.

17. High school students should not be asked to read books about teenagers involved with drugs.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
2%	6%	6%	61%	25%	
8%			86%		(Significant at .005 level: X^2 = 10)*

These results, however, must be qualified. A number of people commented that it is good to deal with drug use provided that the materials teach a lesson about the destructive consequences of drug use. Still others commented that the subject is more suited to health classes. I suspect that objections would be greater if students read books in which characters were incidentally involved with drugs.

Thirdly, most respondents did not object to materials portraying violence:

5. In an effort to prepare high school students for the realities of our world, a teacher is justified in asking them to read books that contain descriptions of violence.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
6%	62%	11%	17%	4%	
68%			21%		(Significant at .005 level: X^2 = 37.5)*

Apparently, the respondents generally do not anticipate negative effects from reading about violence. This question raises a difficult issue. Many people including myself, who would generally be against any censorship may find themselves stymied by the question of violence. While the realities of the world cannot be ignored, do we want to numb the sensitivity to violence? The issue is certainly a matter of controversy that will require the continuing work of psy-

*X^2 is obtained by comparing the sum of those who agree with the sum of those who disagree.

chologist and sociologist to provide answers to parents and educators.

Finally, the noncensorship response prevailed on item seven:

7. If a teacher has books in the classroom for free reading by any interested students, there is no need to exclude materials because of the race, nationality, or social, political, or religious views of the author.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
26%	53%	5%	13%	4%	
79%			17%		(Significant at .005 level: $X^2 = 62.2$)

The idea behind this question is that each person should be, in effect, only his own censor. While it is gratifying that most parents accept the concept of open shelves, it is also dismaying that seventeen percent fear either what their own adolescents will choose to read or what other people's children will choose to read.

Concerning questions on which opinion was fairly evenly divided and between which there were not statistically significant differences, four deserve comment. First, item thirteen:

13. Students in high school should not be assigned books describe a sexual relationship.

SA	A	N	D	SD
18%	28%	11%	36%	6%
46%			42%	

Materials dealing with sexual relationships have always beena source of controversy and censorship attempts. Certainly this community is divided on the issue. A number of people commented that the subject is acceptable if it teaches a moral lesson, for

*X^2 is obtained by comparing the sum of those who agree with the sum of those who disagree.

example, the dire consequences of premarital sex. Also, people undoubtedly made different interpretations of the term "sexual relationships." But, like other questions, the only really exact way of getting at opinions would be to have parents read the books themselves and then make their judgment. The entire issue may never be solved to everyone's satisfaction, but people seem more unsure than adamant about their position, given the high "no opinion" response of 11 percent and the fact that only 24 percent responded in one of the "strong" categories.

A second controversial issue is the concept of the whole versus the part.

18. A teacher should use a book even if, while the whole suits the purposes of the couse, parts of it are objectionable to parents.

SA	A	N	D	SD
6%	32%	18%	34%	10%
38%			44%	

Professional groups (NCTE, ALA), as well as the Supreme Court, have long argued that a book must be judged on its merits as a whole; yet, many censorship attempts are based on objections only to selected passages or words. The response to this item shows that, while the community has not yet come to wholly agree that objectionable parts are not an adequate basis for a book's removal, the respondents found it a difficult question to resolve. The 18 percent figure for "no opinion" is the highest in the survey.

The final subject that the survey explores is anti-religious points of view in books.

10. If, in the teacher's judgment, there is value in a book with an anti-religious viewpoint, the teacher is justified in assigning the book to high school students.

SA	A	N	D	SD
7%	43%	12%	25%	14%
50%			39%	

Some of those who disagreed with this statement argued that because religion is no longer allowed in the schools, neither should anti-religion be allowed. Nevertheless, this question again supports the idea that, although the parents want a reflection of community values, they do not mean to summarily exclude all other views.

The last question to be discussed is item six, the answers to which I did not label as tolerant or intolerant.

6. What a teenager reads influences his values or behavior.

SA	A	N	D	SD
27%	49%	3%	17%	3%
76%			20%	

The difference between 76 percent and 20 percent is statistically significant at the .005 level. Given the high number of respondents who do believe that what their children read will affect their behavior or values, it is not surprising that parents take interest in what their children read and object when they believe the books ideas will undermine their own teachings. It is important, then, that teachers dealing with objectors remember that these parents are very probably concerned with their children's well-being and character.

In summary, the data indicate that the community is generally tolerant and not highly censor-prone. There are no significant differences in attitudes on the basis of sex, age, or education levels. The most likely causes of complaint would be objectionable language and sexual relationships. Books are more likely to come under attack

than films. While the community definitely wants their schools to represent their values and standards, this does not mean that they want narrow education. Rather, the results indicate that most parents support the school offering students the opportunity to explore many value systems.

Comments

The interest that subjects had in the survey is reflected by the number of comments: 60 people or 39 percent made comment, including many "thanks for asking." The comments, of course, were in accordance with the attitudes expressed on the survey itself, although more comments were from people with high scores than low scores.

One of the main themes was that the subject of a book per se is not what makes it objectionable. Rather, they were concerned about whether violence, drugs, etc., were glorified and sensationalized or whether the writers were trying to make an important point. For example, one subject said that "I would object to literature which glorifies or sensationalizes promiscuous sex, violence, drugs, or anti-religious views, especially when such messages are strong, and other value content is weak."

As was mentioned earlier, a number of people expressed the thought that the materials should teach good morals and values. One parent argued that "we should get back to former methods of showing good and evil and bringing out that virtue is rewarded and crime is punished. . . . The schools should be trying to form good people, not presenting student with the choice (and training) of being good, bad, or indifferent." In regard to sexual relationships, another parent commented that,

> "sexual relationships are very real. If a book deals with one in a realistic plane, it should point out obligations, consequences, etc., that elevate that relationship above the purely animal act. For example, Spencer's Mountain is good literature, The Happy Hooker is pornography!"

Finally, they also argued that the way a teacher dealt with the books and the type of discussion that developed were important factors: "Much more depends upon the teacher than the material. Violence, drugs, anti-American governments, etc., could be taught by a teacher in either a way which entices or which directs the student away from the things that can harm the attitudes and life itself." In general, people hoped that teachers would deal with potentially controversial matter in a reasonable way to help guide students to higher levels of moral judgment and social responsibility. Overall, the comments in this vein seemed to be reasonable and thoughtful.

The second trend was in the form of a question. Why, many asked, can't the problem be sidestepped? Specifically, they said that with so much literature available, why must teachers use books that could be had influences on children? One parent was especially vehement on this point:

> I thought some of the reading material in the junior high school was trash. I would imagine they aren't any better in senior high. I resent our tax money being used to line shelves with some objectionable books. There should be enough good books at school to read to satisfy the teacher, students, and parents without hurting any particular persons.

Those with tolerant scores who chose to comment generally argued that only by dealing with controversial issues in high school can students develop open minds as well as the opportunity to discuss and reason out their own opinions. One example is the respondent:

> With a wellbalanced exposure to social, political, religious, racial, educational, the fine arts, music, etc., a teen or a

> child needs exposure in order to grow and fit into society--they need to have a sprinkling of not only the above mentioned subjects, but so much more and hopefully with proper guidance and sense of values will reject that which is harmful to themselves and pursue what is good and never stop inquiring, studying and yet be open minded enough to always see and understand the viewpoints, be they good or bad, of their fellow man.

Finally, people expressed difficulty with some of the questions and wanted to qualify their answers. These qualifications did not amount to changing the question, but they explained the reasons behind their answers.

To conclude this section on comments, although they are not statistical data, they do provide a sense of the concern and thoughtfulness of many people. They help put some of the numbers in perspective and give insight into what is on the minds of parents of today's high school students.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the results of the study are gratifying to me as a teacher in the community. A major conclusion to be drawn from the study is that, while objections may certainly be raised by parents in this community, the complaints of a few cannot be assumed to represent the feelings of most parents. In this community, at least, the parents appear to be tolerant, reasonable,and concerned.

Nevertheless, the strong feelings about objectionable language require that teachers either carefully weigh the value of literature with such language against the rights of parents or that they make serious efforts to explain the use of the books to students and parents and to offer alternatives to individual students. In fact, decreasing use of class novels and stories in favor of individually selected materials may be an eventual solution. Although some parents will object to some materials even being available, this community's standards support the right of individual choice and open shelves.

While the parents were tolerant overall, the areas of divisiveness cannot be overlooked. But, it is no answer to simply conclude that they are wrong and hopethey leave teachers alone. Rather, given the concern parents rightfully have about the influence of the educational system, teachers can take preventive action by opening communication-channels--channels that are especially weak in high schools (except when problems arise). The good response to the survey is a welcome indication that parents want to understand what

is happening in modern classrooms and why. Such communication needn't be an adversary relationship, as it easily can be when neither party understand the other's perspective. While this survey does not help parents understand the English teacher's point of view, it does tell teachers something about parental attitudes. But, it does not tell enough. It is only a beginning.

The survey touches a number of issues that need further study. Certainly, the results of the study need to be researched in more detail. For example, how much objectionable language or what specific words and in what contexts will or will not be acceptable to parents? Similarly, classroom conditions that either aggravate or reduce parental fears about books should be examined. And, as was mentioned earlier, the potential for film to increase censorship attempts needs further clarification. Also, other types of communities should be studied to see if the results of this study can be generalized. Finally, the whole issue of parent-teacher-student rights needs thorough examination and discussion.

Since there is no evidence that censorship attempts are going to dissipate, it can only aggravate an already serious situation to ignore them. The first step in solving any problem has to be understanding. Hopefully, continued research can help us understand the values, goals, and opinions of teachers, students, and parents alike. Once we know each other, we can talk with each other.

APPENDIX A

Cover Letter Enclosed with Survey

Dear Parent,

I am a tenth grade English teacher at Coon Rapids Senior High School. I am also working on my Master's degree in Secondary Education at the University of Minnesota. As part of that program, I am conducting a survey of parental attitudes; I would very much appreciate your assistance in this survey.

In recent years some changes have occurred in the type of materials used in high school English classes across the country. The main changes involve a greater use of modern literature and of films. While many teachers and school district personnel have been involved in these developments, there has been very little input from parents. The purpose of this study is to find out what you, the parent, think about the content of books and films that may be used by high school students. I would like to emphasize here that the questions concern general trends and not, necessarily, specific books or films used at Coon Rapids High School.

It would be a great help to me if one parent (not both) would take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed questionnaire and then return it by mail in the envelope provided. It is important that you respond to each question, including those on sex, age, and education. Please do not sign the surveys; all forms are strictly anonymous and confidential, However, if you are interested in the overall results of the survey, let me know, and I will send them to you when they are ready.

Because of the high cost of postage, I could only send a limited number of surveys; I would really appreciate it if you would answer the questions and return the form. A large number of responses is necessary in order to get an accurate picture of how the community feels.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me any evening (560-6966). Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Susan Nagengast

APPENDIX B

Pilot - Test Evaluation

1. Was any part of the introductory letter unclear? If so, which parts?

2. Are there any questions in your mind that you wish had been answered in the letter?

3. Were the instructions for answering the questions clear?

4. Which, if any, of the questions was confusing or difficult to understand?

5. Were you in any way offended by any of the questions? If so, which ones?

6. If you had received the letter and survey in the mail, do you think you would have participated?

Comments?

Thank you so much for your help.

APPENDIX C

Survey and Results

Sex:___male___female Age:___under 30___30-34___35-39
___40-44___45-49___50-54___55-59___60 or over

Education:___not a high school graduate
___a high school graduate
___graduate of a junior college, college, business school, or technical school

Read each statement carefully; indicate with an x in the parenthesis whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), have no opinion (N), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD). Please respond to each item. You may also comment on any questions on the back of this sheet.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
16	87	18	29	5	1. Books assigned to high school students should reflect the values of the community.
7	18	16	98	16	2. High school students should not be shown a film that shows violence.
54	40	8	45	8	3. There is no good excuse for a teacher asking high school students to read books with language that is generally considered foul, vulgar, or blasphemous.
46	86	14	17	2	4. Books with mainly Black characters deserve a place in the high school English curriculum.
9	91	17	30	8	5. In an effort to prepare high school students for the realities of our world, a teacher is justified in asking them to read books that contain descriptions of violence.
42	76	5	27	5	6. What a teenager reads influences his values or behavior.
40	81	7	21	6	7. If a teacher has books in the classroom for free reading by any interested students, there is no need to exclude materials because of the race, nationality, or social, political, or religious views of the author.

SA	A	N	D	SD	
32	43	7	64	9	8. A film with language that is generally considered foul,vulgar, or blasphemous should never be shown to high school students.
3	4	7	96	45	9. High school studenst should not view a film about teenagers involved with drugs.
11	68	19	38	19	10. If, in the teacher's judgment, there is value in a book with an anti-religious viewpoint, the teacher is justified in assigning the book to high school students.
9	61	26	47	12	11. If a majority of parents do not object to a certain book, a teacher should feel free to use it even if a minority of parents do object.
1	29	11	81	33	12. The purpose of literature in high school is to present the most socially accepted point of view, not all points of view.
28	43	16	57	11	13. Students in high school should not be assigned books that describe a sexual relationship.
16	42	15	73	9	14. There can be no justification for high school students seeing a film with an anti-religious viewpoint.
7	41	15	74	18	15. Teachers should be especially watchful to see that books with unorthodox or extreme views are kept from high school students.
49	99	6	0	1	16. A high school teacher should feel free to show a film with Black characters that helps achieve the goals of the course.
2	50	9	95	39	17. High school students should not be asked to read books about teenagers involved with drugs.
9	49	28	53	16	18. A teacher should use a book even if, while the whole suits the purposes of the course parts of it are objectionable to parents.
39	51	22	29	19	19. There is a definite need in our society for the efforts of civic-minded or religious groups that work to keep schools free from immoral literature.
8	68	16	37	26	20. A film shown to high school students in English class may be suitable even if it deals with a sexual relationship.

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